

From Kashmir to Palestine  
An End to Settler Colonialism

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انقلاب زنده باد

# KASHMIR AND PALESTINE: A STORY OF TWO OCCUPATIONS

*India seeks to tame Kashmiri sentiments for Palestine, knowing that it both expresses a solidarity with a global Muslim issue as well as a recognition of parallels between the two struggles.*



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by Azad Essa



been, but for those under occupation, it carried a message that will forever reverberate.

## Kashmir and Palestine: A Story of Two Occupations

What is hidden within India is Hindustan. It is that which tacitly shapes the state and determines the frontiers between freedom and repression, what is allowed and what is forbidden.

—Perry Anderson

There are Zionism and Israel for Jews, and Zionism and Israel for non-Jews.

—Edward Said

They [India and Israel] fit together like hand in glove.

—Noam Chomsky

Since the 1950s, the spectacle of the “world’s largest democracy” casting a ballot has trumped the workings of democracy itself. At the heart of this convoluted story of India, author Perry Anderson argues, is the “Indian Ideology,” a set of nationalist ideas, primarily but not exclusively propagated by Indian liberals, that have set the contours as to how India is seen, understood and judged. It is the “Indian Ideology” that has created and sustained the belief that at its core India is non-violent, secular, exceptional, democratic, and tolerant. In this version, there is no caste prejudice or anti-Muslim bigotry. And if such incidents make their way into the public sphere, they are the works of extremists; they are not the basis of society. Where writing and scholarship on the sham of Indian secularism is abundant, they remain peripheral. In India, Anderson argues, Gandhi’s doctrines were relegated to the museum but “his saturation of politics with Hindu pathos lived on.”

In this way, Edward Said’s argument that “the concealment by Zionism of its own history has by now become institutionalized, and not only in Israel,” reverberates in the story of India, too. As Dalit writer Kancha Ilaiah argues: “While conducting the anti-colonial struggle, Brahminical leaders and ideologues did not attempt to build an

anti-caste egalitarian ideology. On the contrary, they glorified brutal Hindu institutions. They built an ideology that helped Brahminical forces reestablish their full control which had, to some extent, been weakened during the political rule of the Mughals and the British.” The success of the BJP in India and Likud in Israel, Anderson argues, could not be put down merely to the failures of their precursors in office, “but to their ability to articulate openly what had always been latent in the national movement, but neither candidly acknowledged, nor consistently repudiated.”

Though the Indian constitution guarantees the right to equality and the freedom of religion, in practice, dignity in India has long been predicated on one’s place on the caste hierarchy or proximity to power. Whereas Muslims are ghettoized and periodically excluded from political life, Dalits are humiliated or exceptionalized. Stories of Dalits being killed for eating in front of an upper caste man or drowning in human feces while clearing sewers, still occur with disturbing regularity.

During the Cold War, Indian democracy was a guard against expansionist communism, despite its friendship with the former USSR. Today, it is a bulwark of neoliberalism. Journalist Andre Vltchek writes:

In the West we have a tendency to call these violent countries [like India] “peaceful” and “tolerant” as long as they serve as a buffer against China, as long as they plunder their natural resources on behalf of our private companies, as long as they are willing to uphold savage capitalism.

Indian economic liberalization was, after all, a dream for international corporations looking to reduce labor costs. India was not a land of humans with needs and aspirations, but rather a source of labor and a market to profit from. As a consequence, India’s human rights record and the RSS and Hindutva were evidently ignored by Western observers, too. However, since 2014, the BJP-led government not only passed laws that rankled the constitution, it tampered extensively with the national narrative, as it sought to insert Hinduism into the Indian everyday as the specter of “one nation, one language, one religion”

Israeli occupation of Palestinians has served as a model for others to, if not emulate, then replicate in ways that help surmount the will of not just their own respective colonial or occupied territories, but also, increasingly, their citizens. It is here where the consequences of this relationship between India and Israel becomes clear: they are the blueprint and serve as a model for authoritarian regimes around the world.

Consider Elbit Systems, Israel’s biggest arms manufacturer. It describes itself as “an international electronics defense company,” which is to say it’s in the business of producing products to repress at the behest of its clients. It builds several deadly weapons used by the Israeli military, including the Hermes 900, used since 2014 to survey and conduct airstrikes in the Gaza Strip. Elbit provides much of the technology for the apartheid barrier and the illegal checkpoints in Palestine. Most importantly for this discussion, Elbit’s aspiration for market dominance is to shut down the competition by buying them out. “Elbit buys companies in quick succession, and each new market that opens to the firm through a new acquisition means it is involved in another conflict,” Shir Hever writes. In other words, the expansion of war and conflict is its primary business. It is unsurprising that Elbit has its products in more than a dozen countries, including Colombia, Rwanda, Cameroon, Azerbaijan, and India.

Yet, even as governments around the world come together to kill, repress, and surveil, grassroots people’s movements have attempted to build solidarity across multiple struggles. In August 2020, activists with the group Palestine Action, rallied outside three London offices belonging to the Israeli company Elbit Systems. The rallies were one in a series of direct actions at the arms manufacturer over several months. The activists held banners, drenched the office walls with red paint and called on the landlord of the premises to kick the company out over its role in the continued oppression of Palestinians and indigenous people in other parts of the world. Elbit Systems has four factories in the United Kingdom that produce parts for the drones used by Israel. The activists also spray painted several slogans on the sites, including: “Tested on Palestinians, Used in Kashmir.” A tiny gesture it may have

None of these developments have gone unnoticed. The world is well aware of the immense cruelties unfolding across the country. But where governments can't or won't act, Indian soft power is beginning to take a beating among ordinary people in many parts of the world.

Whereas the story of India's descent into a proto-fascist state has many parts, its burgeoning relationship with the Israeli state and attempt to duplicate its methods is perhaps among the least discussed. The pace at which this relationship has accelerated over the past decade has appeared to catch some by surprise. But India's fraught experiment with democracy is part of the story here, too. In the interim, as "confusion" reigns, both the Indian and Israeli states have focused on exaggerating people to people contacts through Bollywood, yoga, and tech.

In recent years, there has been an increased awareness among grassroots activists, organizations, academics, and journalists about the close relations between India and Israel and what it portends. In January 2020, BDS India, the Indian news sites *News Click* and the *People's Dispatch* released a report detailing the extent of the India-Israel military relationship. The report, titled: "Israel-India Military Relations: Ideological Paradigms of Security" argued that Israel's military ideology, methodology, and technology was sustained by the billion-dollar arms trade and collaboration with India. It described the import of these Israeli methods as "ominous" and "a threat to democracy and human rights wherever it is implemented." Affixed to the report, a warning: "The significant role of Israel in this steadily growing military-industrial complex in India should be cause of serious concern for our civil society." And this is not without precedent.

Israeli weapons, developed and field tested on Palestinians, have periodically found their way to some of the most autocratic and dangerous countries in the world. These include the genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Myanmar. The Israeli arms industry therefore is not merely an introduction to technology, it is an invitation to Israeli governance and surveillance. Increasingly, anti-war activists, socialists, and those fighting for native and indigenous rights across the globe, be it in Hawaii or Ferguson, are recognizing the extent to which the

began to take form.

This Hinduization of the Indian state held several consequences, most notably, the erasure of Muslims and the saffronization of the public space. As one of his first acts as PM, Modi appointed Yellapragada Sudershan Rao to lead the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). Rao, a known caste-apologist, argued in an essay in 2007 that the practice of caste had been widely "misinterpreted as an exploitative social system" and described it as having worked well in ancient times. Rao also deflected questionable or controversial Hindu social customs as having their roots in Muslim rule. In his position as head of the ICHR, he recategorized the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata as "historical documents." It wasn't long after, that these myths and legends entered schools and colleges as "historical facts." The presence and history of Muslims and Christians was subsequently minimized and replaced by Hindu supremacist icons in school curriculums.

In BJP-run states, even India's first PM Nehru was dropped from school and university textbooks. Parallel to the assault on Indian history, came multiple attempts to regulate the lives of Muslims through the accusation of "Love Jihad," a discredited theory that argues Muslim men actively pursue Hindu women with the intention to convert them and shift the religious demographics of the country. In several BJP-led states, conversion through marriage became outlawed. The legal justifications created the civic space for civilians to take up the role of vigilantes. "We beat him in a way that no Muslim will dare to look at a Hindu woman again...we made a Muslim eat his own waste—thrice, in a spoon," one man told Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, who wrote a biography of Modi. Where consensual romantic interfaith liaisons typically elicited, at most, social stigma within families, they now specifically looked to portray Muslim men as weapons of mass conversion. Indian lawyer Arundhati Katju wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that the "crusade against love jihad is not just a quixotic struggle. It marks an ominous turn in the BJP's deepening culture war."

Then came the bans on beef and the slaughter of cattle in the name of creating uniformity. In late September 2015, a 52-year-old Mohammad

Akhlaq was pulled out of his home in the village of Bishara in Uttar Pradesh and beaten to death over suspicions he slaughtered a cow some days earlier. Though his murder elicited widespread condemnation, BJP officials insisted on framing his murder as an accident. In mid-July 2016, seven members of one Dalit family in Gujarat were flogged, tied to a car and made a public spectacle of after they were found skinning a dead cow. The incident illustrated once more the extent to which vigilantism had become state sponsored. Any modicum of secularism, however fraught in India already, had now become antithetical to Hindu dignity. In 2018, the Indian government criminalized the “triple talaaq” practice in which a Muslim man was able to divorce his wife by repeating the intention to divorce (talaaq) three times. The new law granted the state the ability to arrest without a warrant and hold men for up to three-and-a-half years in jail. It prompted rights activists to argue that the law was just another way for the Indian government to criminalize Muslim men, especially given that the Supreme Court had already outlawed the practice.

Parallel to the attacks on Muslims and Dalits came the expansion of “anti-national” and “terrorism” labels. Several prominent Indian activists, like 84-year-old tribal rights activist Father Stan Swamy, Dalit lawyer Surendra Gadling and academic Rona Wilson, were thrown in jail and charged with terrorism for purportedly playing a role in the Bhima Koregaon violence of 2018. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) described the activists as urban naxals of the Naxalite movement, working at the behest of the Maoists, trying to “spread rebellious thoughts” through the creation of an “anti-fascist front” so they could “wage war against the government.” It was clear that the activists were being punished for their advocacy efforts against Modi. In July 2021, the *Washington Post* reported that Arsenal Consulting, a U.S.-based digital forensic firm, had found that the personal devices of Gadling and Wilson had been taken over by hackers and that “evidence” had been planted on their devices. A larger review of the forensics found that the same malware sent to the duo had also been sent to 14 other activists, underscoring the level of depravity exercised by the state. But even then, the incidents to come demonstrated that the Indian government had no intention of backing down.

the pro-freedom leadership is either under arrest or house arrest, the pro-India political leaders, or representatives of the various client regimes India had installed in Kashmir, have become parodies, quite like the Palestinian Authority. In the devastating words of Kashmiri journalist Muzamil Jaleel, “On August 5, 2019, India launched the final assault on the homeland of Kashmiris. The plan is, and always has been, to rob Kashmiris of their land, flood it with settlers, and eventually render the natives into a disempowered minority that’s not fully human, but human object, a thing.”

### *Resistance and Beyond*

All indicators suggest that a project of ethnic cleansing is well underway in India. Minorities are being squeezed under a rubric of an all-consuming Hindu majoritarian project backed by giant oligarchs and corporations that threaten to tear apart a fragile country that has never been a nation. In the ethnocracy, no one is safe. Not journalists. Not Muslims. Not Christians. Not activists. Not even Hindus are safe if they do not conform to the fascist agenda. The assault on dignity has empowered none besides giant corporations and has turned citizens into a morass of disenfranchised subjects. The state is now firmly in the hands of a fiction called the nation.

In Kashmir, the Indian government’s abrogation of the special constitutional clauses that provided certain protections over land and employment was an articulation of the expansionist project, or Akhand Bharat. The consequences have been catastrophic for Kashmiris. But Western democratic states have neither the political inclination nor the moral authority to hold Modi accountable. Delhi knows this. Meanwhile, Muslim majority countries, especially those in the Gulf, have in India an infinite resource of cheap human labor needed to build their luxury cities, a customer of energy, and now a geo-political ally. The fragile protections granted by the facade of the global capital economy has gifted Indian foreign policy a certain arrogance. India’s unemployment rate is soaring. The economy has shown growth but only because of the soaring number of new billionaires. The government, meanwhile, has yet to come clean over the shocking number of Covid-19 deaths.

the Indian government is able to hold an individual without a trial or bail for any activity it deems to be endangering the sovereignty of India (which might mean anything from housing a militant, expressing Kashmir's right to self-determination on social media, or even expressing support for Pakistan during a cricket match against India). In November 2021, prominent rights defender Khurram Parvaz from Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) was taken in too. And when the UAPA is not used to implicate, local intelligence officials harass and intimidate the rest. Officials are known to make unannounced visits to journalists' homes or leave cryptic messages with neighbors. For every Kashmiri journalist who has faced censure or travel restrictions, there are several who have had a visit from the intelligence services and chosen to remain silent about the harassment they face. This clampdown on civil society in Kashmir is especially ominous because it has left very little space for Kashmiris to express dissent. It has also contributed to an even deeper climate of fear and lack of trust, while also making it difficult for Kashmiris to speak out on international platforms. Again, India and Israel are in lockstep with one another. In October 2021, Israel similarly designated six Palestinian civil society groups "terrorist organizations."

The Indian government has also passed a stringent "New Media Policy" which allows "government officers to decide on what is 'fake news' and take action against journalists and media organizations." Local journalists have already argued that the pressure is so immense on them to toe the line, they are now the purveyors of endless government PR. Mosques, religious organizations, and charitable institutions have also been placed under greater scrutiny. Ordinary Kashmiris are also being targeted for their words on social media. They are threatened with termination of employment if they utter "anti-national" ideas. Kashmir, for all intents and purposes, is now under a colonial administration. Whereas the Indian state had exerted control over Kashmir through a military occupation and a puppet legislature in the past, Kashmiris have now become bystanders in their own home, Mohamed Junaid says.

Today, political or civic space in Kashmir has been emptied out. Whereas

In July 2021, Father Stan Swamy, already suffering from Parkinson's disease, contracted Covid-19 in jail and died. Another activist, 70-year-old Gautum Navlakha, found himself housed in a temporary prison in which 350 prisoners were stacked in six rooms sharing three toilets. The cruelty (in a time of Covid-19 pandemic no less) was by design. Father Swamy had railed for more than three decades for the rights of tribal communities on matters of land, forest, and labor in the face of corporate takeovers. Likewise, Navlakha spoke up against India's policies in Kashmir and the tie-ups between Indian corporate oligarchs and arms manufacturers. The message was clear. There was no room for dissidents in what was fast hurtling toward a polity ruled by one dominant group.

### *The Rise of the Ethnocracy*

In late December 2021, Hindu nationalists and supremacists gathered in the city of Haridwar in India for a three-day meeting known as a Dharam Sansad, a religious parliament made up of prominent Hindu religious leaders. They raised their right arm, in the form of a Nazi salute and pledged to empty the country of its Muslim population. "We all take an oath, give our word, and make a resolution that, until our last breath, we will make India a Hindu nation and keep it a Hindu only nation," Suresh Chavhanke, a right-wing journalist, said to a crowd at the forum. "We will fight, and die, and, if required, we will kill as well. We will not hesitate a bit to make any sacrifice at any cost. To complete this resolution, our Gurudev, our teacher, our goddess Mother India, our ancestors, give us power, give us victory," he said to the chorus of those in attendance.

Swami Prabodhanand Giri, one of the leaders of the assembly, invoked the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya minority in neighboring Myanmar in his address. "Like Myanmar, the police, politicians, the army, and every Hindu in India must pick up weapons and do this cleansing. There is no other option left," Giri said. The audacious incident made its way onto video and was subsequently circulated across the internet and social media. The open and unequivocal calls for the genocide of

Muslims at the Dharam Sansad immediately became a media spectacle. However, the utterances of these Monks were only the next logical step in the completion of the Hindutva project: annihilation. The calls for the “cleansing of Muslims” had the hallmarks of the RSS and their Hindu nationalist and supremacist ideals that began close to 100 years prior. It was in harmony with the Hinduizing of the instruments of the Indian state as directed by the forces of Hindutva and a duplication of ultra-right-wing rallies in Israel that called for the “death of Arabs.”

Since the Nakba, Israel has pursued a project of “Judaizing” Palestine. This has entailed the combined tactics of land expropriation, ethnic cleansing, geographic renaming, as well as the pursuit of apartheid policies of segregation in legal, education, social services, and living facilities. Israel is, by definition, a Jewish state. It also self-describes as democratic and is considered among the family of Western nations. As the “only democracy in the Middle East,” Israel is given a pass for its transgressions. Its brutality toward Palestinians are deemed “mistakes” or the result of provocations in a neighborhood of autocratic brutes. As a country, part of the ambit of “civilized nations,” its deep militarism is seen as an effect, and not the cause of its troubles. But given that Israel has no Constitution and therefore no defined borders, its efforts to impose cultural, ethnic, and religious values to territory beyond the UN chartered 1948 borders shows that it has no ambition to be a democracy either. “The classification of Israel as a democracy may appear to function more as a tool for legitimizing the political and legal status quo than as a scholarly exploration guided by empirical accuracy or conceptual coherence,” academic Oren Yiftachel writes. There are elections, a judiciary, and Palestinian citizens of Israel can vote and can run for the Knesset; Israeli journalists operate with relative freedom, too. But whereas Jews in Israel enjoy full citizenship, Palestinian citizens of Israel are at best second-class and Palestinians in the occupied territories are regarded as no more than an excess demographic. Several mainstream human rights groups, from Israeli human rights group B’tselem, to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have categorized Israel as an apartheid state. “In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices, and state violence designed

toward these purposes. Back to back lockdowns have resulted in massive economic losses for Kashmir’s industries, including tourism, handicrafts, horticulture, IT, and e-commerce. Furthermore, “as with other colonial powers, Indian officials are participating in international investment summits parroting Kashmir as a ‘Land of Opportunity,’ setting off a scramble for Kashmir’s resources, which will cause further environmental destruction.” India has always kept a close eye on Kashmir’s water resources and its capabilities to generate electricity, while intentionally depriving Kashmir of the electricity it produces.

As more economic and employment opportunities are opened up to Indian domiciles, Kashmiris will also be deprived of what little job security they had. In sum, “neoliberal policies come together with settler colonial ambitions under continued reference to private players, industrialization and development, with the ‘steady flow of wealth outwards.’” The role of the United Arab Emirates is especially important in this context, as it became the first country to explore investment opportunities in Kashmir after India annexed the region. Dubai ports giant DP World said in January 2022 they would be building an inland port while Dubai developer Emaar Properties announced it would build a mall in Srinagar. Meanwhile, the Lulu Group, an Indian Muslim owned but UAE-headquartered company, said they would set up a food processing plant. It is no surprise, given the UAE’s leading role in normalizing relations with Israel, that they are now being positioned as integral to the Indian settler-colonial project in Kashmir, too.

“What such investment in Kashmir will look like is easy to guess from a cursory glance at the rest of India: more trash, more cars, more pollution, more concrete, more aggressive Hindu rock music, and ever more ugly assertions of the race spirit that Golwalkar wanted Hindus to learn from Nazis. The BJP wants to allow its Hindu majoritarian supporters to expand into Kashmir. If it looks like settler colonialism, that’s because it is,” Indian novelist Siddharth Deb wrote.

And contrary to the claims of peace and development, these developments have come amid an atmosphere of spectacular intimidation. Under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA),

of the plan is to transfer agricultural land to Indian state and private corporations. Kashmir has already lost 78,700 hectares of agricultural land to nonagricultural purposes between 2015–19. This decline in agricultural land—which a majority of Kashmiris still rely upon as the foundation of their economy—will disempower farmers, result in a loss of essential crops, make Kashmir less agriculturally self-sufficient, and create grounds for economic collapse in the near future. It is of course, only when Kashmiris are economically devastated that India’s job in securing their land will be made even easier.

Alongside the destruction of agricultural land, the Indian government has also been charged with “ecocide” in Kashmir, which, “masked under the development rhetoric...destroys the environment without care, extracting resources and expanding illegal infrastructure as a way of contesting the indigenous peoples’ right of belonging and using the territory for their own gain.” During the lockdown in late 2019, the valley saw unprecedented forest clearances. In June 2020, the Jammu & Kashmir Forest Department became a government-owned corporation, allowing it to sell public forest land to private entities, including to Indian corporations. The rush to secure and extract Kashmir’s resources has typically come at an immense cost to the region’s vulnerable ecology, prompting local activists’ fears that a lack of accountability will almost certainly exacerbate the climate crisis in South Asia. Just as Israel has secured control over Palestinian resources, India’s stranglehold of Kashmir’s natural resources and interference with the environment will ultimately make Kashmiris dependent on the Indian state for their livelihoods. All of these shifts in land use reflect the “Srinagar Master Plan 2035,” which “proposes creating formal and informal housing colonies through town planning schemes as well as in Special Investment Corridors,” primarily for the use of Indian settlers and outside investors. Indeed, the Indian government has signed a series of MOU’s with outside investors to alter the nature of the state by building multiplexes, educational institutions, film production centers, tourist infrastructure, Hindu religious sites, and medical industries. Kashmiri investors are no competition for massive Indian and external corporations and have a fundamental disadvantage in investing in land banks that the government has apportioned

to cement the supremacy of one group—Jews—over another—Palestinians. A key method in pursuing this goal is engineering space differently for each group,” B’tselem wrote.

Given Israel’s predilection for its policies to be shaped by and contingent on a Jewish identity, its polity is best described as an ethnocracy. And it’s certainly not the only one. Other polities that function under the veneer of democratic norms but were nonetheless strong-armed by a dominant ethnic group that presided over different tiers of citizenship with insiders and outsiders, include Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda and now, more comprehensively, India. Yiftachel’s charge that Israel is a “regime premised on a main project of ethnonational expansion and control and on a parallel self-representation of the system as democratic,” is a befitting description of Modi’s India, too. The Hinduization of public institutions since 1947 notwithstanding, the extent to which the Modi government has attempted to complete this project is unprecedented.

This particular government is not simply keen on having very close and deeper relations with Israel because of its strategic calculations, however misguided they may be, but they also have a very strong admiration for Israel and how it has established a Jewish state through the repression and humiliation of Palestinians.

Achin Vnaik told me, adding: “This is because this government, through its quest to establish a de jure Hindu state has learnt a number of lessons from Israel and is of course, using those lessons against what it considers to be its principal enemy: Muslims.”

And this resentment is deeply rooted in a hateful mythology perpetuated and propagated by the RSS. Traces of Vladimir Jabotinsky, the father of revisionist Zionism, can be found in the work of M.S. Golwalkar, the most influential of leaders within the RSS. In 1923, Jabotinsky promised “equality” for Palestinians should they submit to the Jewish colonization. In some ways, Golwalkar took it further when he wrote in 1939 that:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture...or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights.

Muslims and Christians could be citizens with limited rights, while drawing loyalty for the Hindu nation from minorities would only be achieved by the threat of violence. For Hindu supremacists then, the presence of Muslims and Christians in India was a daily reminder of their failure to resist “foreign occupation,” to resist “conversion,” and maintain “self-definition.” Muslims were therefore “anti-nationals” by their existence alone, standing in the way of Hindu India’s rejuvenation.

And central to the momentum was the creation of a legal justification for these ethnonationalist endeavors to be carried out. Hence, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was intended to differentiate citizenship within the Hindu nation. By the logic of the CAA, Hindus in India would be privileged in the same way “Jewish nationality is privileged over Israeli citizenship.” Therefore, Muslims would have to accept their subordination to the Hindu homeland. If they were to prove citizenship, they were still not part of the nation, unless they converted to Hinduism, or as Hindu supremacists describe it: “Ghar Wapsi” (come home). As Pinky Chaudhary, a leader of a far-right Hindu group called the Hindu Raksha Dal, told a crowd in the capital in August 2021:

No matter who comes to power, we will not allow Muslims to rise up. We are in the process of awakening our youth. We will get mullahs out of graves and finish them from their roots...you will see we will create a situation where Muslims have to either convert to Hinduism or they will be sent to Pakistan.

As Satradu Sen described it: there was no contradiction in being both the dominated and the domineer for the Hindu or Zionist nation.

power, the Indian army has already swallowed vast tracts of land for its barracks and bases spread all across Kashmir. The details of these installations and the scale of these bases remain obscure, with the military using “national security” as a means of subterfuge. By 2020 the Indian army held around 53,353 hectares in Kashmir with 243 hectares of additional forest land approved for use by the Indian forces between September 18, 2019 and October 21, 2019 alone. The new law, passed in October 2020, gave every Indian citizen the right to buy land in Kashmir. The region was officially up for sale.

The state also repealed land reform acts from the 1950s that had placed restrictions on the amount of land that any individual could hold, meaning that Indians could now purchase unlimited amounts of land. Meanwhile the right-to-return of those state-subjects “displaced by the incomplete and unending partition of Kashmir” were immediately extinguished with the application of the Central Enemy Properties Act 1968. A few months later, another law was passed that allowed the Indian army to “mark any property or area in Jammu and Kashmir as ‘strategic’ and take it over without any local government permissions and ignoring civilian objections.” For example, in January 2022, the army grabbed over 50.5 hectares of land in the tourist areas of Gulmarg and Sonmarg under this dispensation, stating that the land would be used for “operational and training requirements” of the armed forces. In this way, the Indian government had paved the way for the army and corporations to take control of the state.

The Indian state has already begun to evict indigenous communities from their homes. In late 2020, tribal communities received notice that labeled their homes as illegally occupying forest land. Their homes were demolished. This bears an eerie resemblance to Israel’s targeting of Bedouin communities of Naqab, where Israel gave the lands of these communities to Jewish settlers and the military. The logic of Bedouin dispossession was premised on the fact that as nomads, they had no right to the land.

In Kashmir, these communities were living on lands that the Indian state wanted to use for the development of tourist infrastructure. Part

the title “Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Order, 2020.” This law “created a series of categories through which Indians—who had previously not been able to own land or access government jobs as they were reserved for Kashmir’s “permanent residents”—would now be able to lay claim to residency rights.” It allows those who “have resided or studied in the state for 15 years or seven years,” respectively, to qualify for domicile, entitled to residency and employment rights. In addition, children of Indian government officials, including army and paramilitary, who have served in the state for ten years are eligible to apply for government jobs.” All those who sought residency rights, including native Kashmiris, would now have to obtain a domicile certificate. This law makes it possible for the hundreds of thousands of Indian soldiers, as well as laborers, to retroactively or eventually, seek residency status in Kashmir. As more Indian businesses and corporations are legally able to operate in Kashmir, the number of those likely to claim permanent residency in the future will naturally increase. The “military occupation and forceful entry (will be) transformed into a natural one of belongingness over time.” True to form, Kashmiri resistance to this forcible demographic change—including armed resistance—will remain “terrorism,” while the Hindu settler will be portrayed as the “innocent civilian.”

International law prohibits occupying powers to transfer their own population into territories or change their demographic makeup as a means to avoid ethnic cleansing. The facilitation of Indian settlers into Kashmir will alter the demographic makeup of the state, thereby ending the possibility of a just solution in the region. In the interim, the Indian government will exercise delimitation—or change electoral boundaries—to grant more electoral sway to existing and future Hindu-majority districts in Kashmir. This “settler implantation and demographic gerrymandering” is intended to counter the Muslim majority. In this way, decisions made by any legislative body will be deemed “democratic” and “representative” of the people of Kashmir.

The Indian government also passed another law, the “Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Adaptation of Central Laws Third Order, 2020” pertaining to the use of land. As an occupying

“Like Zionism in the present time, it is the simultaneous consciousness of privilege and oppression, undeniable power, and irrational anxieties (being outbred, being converted, being ‘defamed,’ being eliminated.”

The CAA legislation prompted a wave of protests in 2020, to which the Indian government responded by supporting a pogrom against Muslims in lower income neighborhoods in Delhi. Around 50 people, mostly Muslim, were killed as mobs of Hindu nationalists hunted down those who dared to complain about the beloved homeland. Like they had done in the Bhima Koregaon case, authorities used the occasion to arrest several activists, including former student activist Umar Khalid, keeping him in solitary confinement for up to 20 hours a day several times over a period of eight months. “Clearly, the process itself is the punishment,” Khalid said from jail. Likewise, Sharjeel Imam, was another activist arrested under the UAPA and charged with various violations, including sedition for four speeches he delivered during the anti-CAA protests. Imam, a Delhi court claimed, had made statements geared to incite and provoke Indian Muslims to act against the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of India. “[His] speech also appears to challenge the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India,” the court said in its order on framing charges against the activist. “It also appears to create hatred/contempt for the lawful institutions of the state and to challenge them by unlawful means.” Imam had told “protesters to cut off Assam from India” in what he later explained was a call to protest by occupying roads. Authorities said he was asking for secession. Any effort to talk back against the state could result in the charge of terrorism; any effort to back the state project was understood as patriotism. Even international condemnation led nowhere. Amnesty International described the UAPA as “routinely used against people for simply expressing dissenting opinions often without evidence.” That was in April 2020. By the end of September, Amnesty’s operations in Delhi were forced to shut down. Their offices had been raided and their accounts frozen. But Amnesty wasn’t the only one impacted in India; the attack was part of a larger stranglehold over civil society. Within two years of coming into power in 2014, the Indian Home Ministry had canceled the licenses of nearly 20,000 NGOs from receiving foreign funds. They were deemed to be against

“the public interest.”

It was not surprising, then, that the Indian government would say nothing about the call for genocide by the Hindu Monks at the Dharam Sansad in Haridwar. The hate speech after all had merely built on a long drawn out architecture of hate and fear of Muslims. Instead, former Indian diplomats wrote a letter questioning the outrage it had elicited. They insinuated that sentiments espoused at the conference of top-level Hindu leaders were of a fringe nature and not representative of Modi’s project. Among the signatories of the letter was Lakshmi Puri, a former Indian diplomat and former deputy executive director of UN Women. For years, Puri has touted herself as a champion of girls and women’s rights, winning the Eleanor Roosevelt award for human rights in 2016. But as *Kashmiris* and Indian Muslims have repeatedly argued, Islamophobia is what tethers the liberal Indian to Hindu supremacist class in India. In the case of Puri, the analogy held true in the very same household. Lakshmi Puri is married to Hardeep Singh Puri, Modi’s Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas as well as Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Her defense, then, only exemplified the collective buy-in of the Indian political elite. Despite the attempts to characterize the Dharam Sansad as a marginal affair, an investigation by digital news site Article 14, found that over a period of two years, the far right in India had organized around twelve events across four states that similarly called for the genocide of Muslims, attacks on Christians, and an insurrection against the government. It also found that the meetings were coordinated, that several more were planned and despite the level of hate, “the police see no conspiracy, the main organizers are free, and there are clear contradictions in the way they are treated by the justice system.”

When Modi did speak on the controversies surrounding the Dharam Sansad in early 2022, his message came across loud and clear. “In the last 75 years, we only kept talking about rights, fighting for rights and wasting time. The talk of rights, to some extent, for some time, may be right in a particular circumstance, but forgetting one’s duties completely has played a huge role in keeping India weak,” he said.

“gut-wrenching genocide of Kashmir Hindus” to the big screen.

But had there been a genocide of Kashmiri Pandits? When the upheavals began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, an estimated 120,000 Kashmiri Hindus left under conditions which remain contested. India refuses to allow any international investigation into the conditions that led Kashmiri Hindus to leave the valley, relying instead on right-wing narratives that Kashmiri Muslims drove them out. According to Indian government figures, 219 Kashmiri Pandits were killed between 1989–2004. Meanwhile, many *Kashmiri* Muslims argue that while Kashmiri Pandits had left out of fear, the Indian government, under the draconian governor at the time, Jagmohan, had facilitated their departure, promising that they would return once India dealt with the armed uprising. Pro-freedom leaders in Kashmir have repeatedly called for the return of Kashmiri Pandits, but have urged them to return as neighbors and not settlers. In other words, Agniharti was promising to produce an alternate history of the Kashmir dispute in which Kashmiri Muslims were the rampaging extremists.

As Deepa Misri and Mona Bhan argue, “One of the most enduring mainstream narratives around the departures of Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990s is that they were “driven out” by their Muslim neighbors as the armed militancy took off. This is a narrative that has displaced every other analysis of these tragic departures, offering up Kashmiri Pandits as singular and exclusive victims in the violent modern history of Kashmir, even as Kashmiri Muslims have in their turn endured violent crackdowns, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and a general devaluation of every form of political power, including the right to protest their oppressive conditions.” The *Kashmir Files* was finally released in early 2022. It was promoted by the BJP, made tax-free in several states. It became a box office hit.

Since August 2019, the Indian government has embarked on several devastating administrative changes in order to accelerate its settler-colonial project. One of these changes was the introduction of the category of “domicile,” or permanent residency rights, which was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 31, 2020 under

an evening in November 2019 at the private residence of Sandeep Chakravorty, India's then consul-general to the United States. During the course of the event, Chakravorty addressed the gathering, made up of Indians and members of the Kashmiri Hindu community (known as Kashmiri Pandits). He assured the crowd that India would build settlements modeled after Israel in preparation for the return of the Hindu population to Kashmir. As Chakravorty said:

I believe the security situation will improve, it will allow the refugees to go back, and in your lifetime, you will be able to go back...and you will be able to find security, because we already have a model in the world. I don't know why we don't follow it. It has happened in the Middle East. If the Israeli people can do it, we can also do it.

The event was broadcast over Facebook, stirring a diplomatic controversy. Chakravorty's comments hadn't merely contradicted India's official opposition to Jewish-only settlements in the occupied territories, it demonstrated that in Kashmir, it was willing to replicate it. Kashmiri novelist Mirza Waheed wrote that the comparison with Israel "cannot have any other meaning but an endorsement of a settler-colonial project." Chakravorty said his comments were taken out of context. Yet, Chakravorty's call for the Israeli model replicates the demand by some right-wing Kashmir Pandit groups like Panun Kashmir, as well as the BJP itself, to create Hindu-only settlements in Kashmir, buttressed by additional security and militarized infrastructure such as walls, separate roads, and checkpoints, not unlike Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank. As Azadeh Shahshahani and Zainab Ramahi argue, "The Palestinian experience may offer a window into the future for Kashmiris, with massive Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and dual legal systems, creating conditions that have been described as 'worse than apartheid.'"

Chakravorty's comments were also especially poignant because they took place during an event in which Vivek Agnihorti, an Indian filmmaker, along with Bollywood actor Anupham Kher were trying to secure support for a project called "The Kashmir Files," a film they promised would "bring the unreported story of the most tragic and

Predictably, in the months following the Haridwar meet, the rhetoric deepened, and incidents of anti-Muslim hate escalated. Swami Giri, among the main speakers at the event, was given a warm welcome in Ghaziabad in early January 2022, where he clarified his call for violence against Muslims. "Whoever has understood the Quran is a jihadi... Every Hindu should keep weapons at home. When you do that, you will be blessed by Ram and Krishna. You need the weapons now, to wage war against the jihadis," Giri said. In 2017, the same Giri had urged Hindu couples to produce eight children to protect their religion. "In the present times, there is threat to Hindutva and to protect it is the responsibility of every Hindu. For this, every Hindu should produce eight children so that he can contribute toward conserving, preserving and protecting Hindutva and the society." It wasn't long before every facet of Muslim life became a target. Young Muslim women were banned from wearing the headscarf at several colleges in the southern state of Karnataka. When the matter was taken to court, the Karnataka High Court upheld the ban, arguing the headscarf was not obligatory for Muslim women. Legal scholars described it as constitutional overreach and cited concerns for similar moves in other states. Soon after, Hindu supremacists called for a ban on halal meat stores in Karnataka, too. By mid-2022, the Indian government added an additional Israeli tactic to their arsenal: the bulldozing of Muslim homes. On the first day of Ramadan, Hindu mobs, draped in saffron scarves, marched through Muslim neighborhoods in Karauli, Rajasthan, stopping outside homes and mosques to sing songs into loudspeakers:

We are hardcore Hindus, we will create a new history  
We will enter the homes of enemies, and will cut their heads [...]  
In every home the saffron flag will be seen, the rule of Ram will return.  
There is only one slogan, one name, victory to Lord Ram, victory to Lord Ram.

When Muslims reacted by pelting the mobs with stones, and scuffles ensued, homes and businesses were razed to the ground. Police officers swooped in and arrested Muslims deemed to be "rioters." As

they sat in jail, bulldozers arrived at the suspected rioters' homes and smashed them to the ground. The scenes would repeat themselves in Jahangirpuri in north Delhi and Khargone in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Several Indian administrations have used bulldozers in flagrant disregard of the constitution to displace the poor and the marginalized. Former Indian PM Sanjay Gandhi did it in 1982 in Jahangirpuri itself. "What is new is selective political targeting now, especially by the BJP governments," Naveen Tewari and Sandeep Pandey write. Then in June, authorities in Allahabad arrested Javed Muhammad, father of prominent Indian Muslim activist Afreen Fatima, alleging that he had led a protest days earlier over derogatory comments made by a BJP spokesperson about the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) days earlier. As her father languished in jail, Fatima and the rest of the family were first detained, then later forced out of their home. The next morning, they watched on television as their house was razed to the ground. "What is more humiliating than seeing bulldozers laying waste to your homestead in broad daylight, as neighbors or distant strangers on television sets and smart-phones spectate, either helplessly or gleefully?" Angshuman Choudhury writes. The actions on Muslims are in keeping with the punitive measures exercised by the Israelis on Palestinian homes and neighborhoods for the "crime" of resisting occupation and oppression. Afreen Fatima, too, is unequivocal about the parallel. "The idea is to punish Muslims and to let them know that we (the Indian government) can say whatever we want and you can't do anything about it," Fatima told me.

The goal of Hindu majoritarianism, therefore, is the subordination of the Muslim minority. "This can involve forms of internment and expulsion [in India] and in Jammu and Kashmir, the attempt to bring about demographic changes through encouragement of Hindu migration from elsewhere," Achin Vnaik told me. Vnaik added, "The nearest Indian equivalent to Israel's occupied territories is the Kashmir Valley but otherwise Muslims are spread all over the rest of India; expulsion or internment policies can only be selective and limited."

Kashmiris have long identified with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. In back alleys of the capital Srinagar, cries of "Free

Pinkwashing itself is a tactic almost certainly borrowed from the Israeli playbook in which a civilizing quest is used to conceal a project of ethnic cleansing. Israel denies Palestinian presence, history, and even claim to the land by taking over homes, renaming villages and towns, appropriating cuisine in the pursuit of removing the Palestinian footprint. Likewise, India, through a policy of "domestication"—or to use BJP leader Ram Madhav's words: "instilling India" into Kashmiri Muslims—seeks to make Kashmiri Muslims relinquish their cultural and political identity and submit to the larger Indian Hindu project. Crucially, most Indian liberals and Hindu supremacists are in agreement that Kashmir is fundamental to India—be it secular or Hindu Rashtra.

Kashmiri scholars Samreen Mushtaq and Mudasir Amin warn against characterizing the events of August 5, 2019 as the beginning of the settler-colonial project in Kashmir, but rather as an extension of the vast matrix of control that included "spatial, demographic, and ecological manifestations" that "is both a historical practice and a present day engagement rather than a singular event of invasion." While the framework of settler-colonialism may be a useful way to make the situation on ground in Kashmir comprehensible for international audiences, the authors argue that:

the reliance on a future Indian-citizen-settler runs the risk of invisibilizing the Indian armed forces already permanently stationed in Kashmir and occupying vast tracts of land. The settler colonial framework can be a useful concept for Kashmir when its shrewd combination of assimilationist and eliminationist tactics is placed within the framework of military occupation, rather than as a distinct alternative.

Collectively, this framework is set on ultimately destroying "the very idea of what it means to be a native—the elimination of history and culture such that there is a total de-familiarization with the idea of Kashmir as the homeland for the natives, going beyond disappearing, and killing the Kashmiri body."

One of the most fervent manifestations of this approach came on

nationalists and supremacists in India. They had resented the autonomy PM Nehru had “granted” Kashmir in 1947 and wished to see Kashmir fully integrated into India. For Hindu-supremacists, these two articles were an obstruction to the region’s full integration into the Indian state and had contributed to the rise of “separatism” or “terrorism” in the region—which is how India refers to Kashmiris’ decades long resistance to Indian rule. To the Hindu right, the problems in Kashmir were borne out of India’s coddling of Kashmiri Muslims. The question of Kashmiri self-determination had never been on the agenda. The removal of the two Articles was therefore portrayed as ushering in a “New Kashmir” in which peace and prosperity would arrive through Indian investment and development. This had been a central plank of Narendra Modi’s second election campaign, too.

Following the events of August 5, BJP politicians bragged of being able to not only buy land in Kashmir, but also “marry fair-skinned Kashmiri women.” In the U.S., the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) published a “Reporter’s Guide” on the situation in Kashmir. Central to this document were the false claims that ending Kashmir’s semi-autonomy would result in equal property rights for women, more protections for the LGBTQI+ community and better opportunities for Dalits in Kashmir. Again, none of these claims were even loosely based on facts. Writing in the Indian digital publication, *The Wire*, Anish Gawande, co-founder and curator of Pink List India, compared the Indian government’s attempt to use the LGBTQI+ community to “pinkwashing,” adding that claims of “gay liberation” in Kashmir since India annexed it was nothing but “a product of digital propaganda.” On “pinkwashing,” an author who identifies as a queer Kashmiri Pandit wrote the following on the condition of anonymity:

Using pinkwashing tactics, India ensures that any violent action they take against Kashmiris can be excused because they have deemed themselves the “progressive liberators” of Kashmir. Even while propagating the myth of their LGBTQ saviorism abroad and to international audiences at U.S. Congressional hearings, they continue to fan the flames of queerphobia and transphobia to court the favor of the right wing.

“Palestine” are spray painted on steel shutters next to walls with “Free Kashmir” and “Go India Go” slogans. Kashmiri youth have been killed by the Indian army in protests for Palestine, while artists and religious leaders have been detained for expressing their solidarity with Palestine. India seeks to tame Kashmiri sentiments for Palestine, knowing that it both expresses a solidarity with a global Muslim issue as well as a recognition of parallels between the two struggles. When police and army have harassed non-violent protests, Kashmiri boys and girls have resorted to stone pelting, like the “children of the stones” as Palestinian youth were referred to during the first intifada.

The question of Palestine, after all, and the dispute in Kashmir emerged from the ashes of British colonialism. Whereas Palestinians were uprooted by the Nakba, hundreds of thousands of people from Jammu and Kashmir were displaced too in the weeks and months following Partition and as a result of a large-scale massacre against the Muslim population in the region of Jammu. Over the years, both the Kashmiri and Palestinian right to national self-determination have been subsequently reduced into a rubric of religious conflict: Hindu versus Muslim in Kashmir and Jew versus Muslim in Palestine. Both Palestine and Kashmir have been severely sold out by their leaders. Under the 1975 Indira-Sheikh Accord, Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah, who had spent more than a decade in prison, forfeited the demand for self-determination in exchange for being the chief minister of the state. Almost 20 years later, the Oslo accords would accomplish much of the same for the Palestinians. Kashmiris were moved by the first intifada in the late 1980s in fomenting their own mass uprising against Indian rule.

In the post-9/11 moment and in the context of global anti-Muslim racism, both struggles against foreign occupation were slipped under the rubric of “Islamic terrorism.” Palestine and Kashmir are targets of the ethno-nationalist ideologies of Zionism and Hindutva that seek their eradication. As colonial projects, India and Israel have exercised similar modalities of control to wield power of their dominions: extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, maiming, torture, economic dependencies, surveillance, home demolitions (or spaciocide),

restrictions on mobility, checkpoints, a network of informers, as well as the creation of a collaborator class—the Palestinian Authority in Palestine, as well as pro-India “unionist” parties in Kashmir like the National Conference and the People’s Democratic party (PDP). Both countries also instrumentalize the law to protect their armed forces. Whereas the Indian government uses the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFPSA), to provide cover for the abuses of their soldiers, an entire cultural and legal apparatus in Israel protects Israeli soldiers from facing accountability for “unjustified use of lethal force.”

Several similarities notwithstanding, it is not my intention here to argue that the occupations of Palestine and Kashmir are the same. They aren’t. Instead, the comparison between India and Israel is meant to illustrate the ways in which oppressive methods are shared and duplicated and crucially, justified. As Samreen Mushtaq and Mudasir Amin argue:

The colonization of Kashmir, like Palestine, is not just the influx of a settler population that would derive multiple economic and political benefits at the cost of the natives. It is to be the “crown” of a Hindutva project that wants to make itself the only legitimate sovereign of a people that refuses its control over them.

In this way, there are similarities between India’s effort in Kashmir with the Chinese pursuit to assimilate Tibet and erase Uighur religious and cultural identity. In East Turkestan or Xinjiang, Beijing uses mass surveillance and the threat of incarceration to control the Uighur population. It has also flooded the region with Han Chinese to alter the demography. Former Indian army general Bipin Rawat, after all, called for “de-radicalization” camps to house Kashmiri children. India’s occupation of Kashmir also shares similarities with Morocco’s occupation of the Western Sahara. With Israel and Morocco having established ties in December 2020 on the basis of America’s recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, the similarities between the Kashmiri and Sahrawi experience is only likely to grow. But where India and Israel use the liberal lexicon of democracy as well as a religious, right-wing civilizational argument

to justify ethnonationalism, China or Morocco show little interest in wrapping their programs within democratic facades.

### *The Israeli Model in Kashmir*

In the days leading to August 5, 2019 and in the weeks and months to come, Kashmir became a site of unfathomable cruelty. Thousands of Kashmiris were detained; pro-India politicians were placed under house arrest, profreedom leaders as well as minors were rounded up and thrown in jail. Young boys were shipped off to Indian prisons 1,500km away in Agra and Varanasi. Foreign journalists and international human rights groups were banned from access to Kashmir. The region was placed under a complete communication blackout. Cellular phones, Internet, landline services, and even the postal services were dismantled. News traveled by word of mouth. Journalists compressed photos and video onto memory cards and smuggled them out with passengers en route to Delhi. Schools, offices, banks, and businesses were closed for months. Life came to a standstill.

On August 5, 2019, the Modi government revoked both Articles 370 and 35A, split the region into two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, and placed them under the direct control of Delhi. Kashmir had been effectively annexed. It was a stunning rebuke to the myth of Indian democracy as well as the veneer of Kashmiri autonomy. Observers warned that this move represented an intensification of India’s settlercolonial project in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Under the new status of the state, India would now have the legal justification to allow non-Kashmiris to access residency rights in Kashmir as well as purchase land that had previously been restricted to Kashmiri permanent residents, or state subjects. The end goal was now within sight: Kashmir’s Muslim-majority demography would be changed in favor of Indian Hindus. In time, elections would be held, and democracy would cover for the ethnocratic, colonial rule that had been imposed on the region.

Revoking Article 370 and Article 35A were long-held goals of Hindu